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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL WEIL MEETINGS IN PARIS ON PUBLIC OUTREACH

Summary

1. Lynne Weil, Communications Director for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, received a comprehensive overview of Embassy Paris' active Muslim and diversity outreach programs in a series of meetings with embassy, government, NGO and media representatives December 8-10. Public Affairs programs -- from grants to International Visitor (IV) programs to providing space for meetings and events -- have produced tangible results, French interlocutors said. At an Embassy roundtable, Weil heard from activists who are applying best practices learned during IV programs and using U.S. grants to promote cooperation, integration and minority participation in France's political life. In Paris' poorer suburbs, local government and media experts described to Weil the challenges people of immigrant and minority origin face with respect to equal opportunity. In addition to representing the USG at an Aid-al-Adha service in Drancy (a former staging point for Holocaust deportations and now a community with a large Muslim population and an imam committed to interfaith dialogue), Weil also met with a variety of social entrepreneurs, scholars and imam trainers to discuss the impact of USG public diplomacy programs. End Summary.

Embassy Programs Help in 19th District

2. Embassy support has been essential to promoting integration and cooperation in Paris' mixed 19th district, one of the district's deputy mayors, Adjil Ahoudian, told Weil at an Embassy roundtable discussion December 8. The 19th is Paris' most diverse area, with large groups of new immigrants from Asia and North Africa as well as newcomers from Afghanistan and Iraq living side by side with Europe's largest Jewish community. French official institutions provide very limited support for the district's integration and conciliation initiatives, Ahoudian said, emphasizing that he communicates closely with the Embassy's public affairs staff to discuss ideas. Ahoudian, an IV alumnus, is in charge of the new "To Live Together" project, whose goal is to increase understanding and reduce the potential for clashes among the district's disparate communities. An uptick in gang violence this fall in the 19th has added urgency to the matter. Yet USG-sponsored visits from the Freedom Writers Foundation, the Interfaith Youth Corps, U.S. urban civic groups, and representatives from the U.S. nonprofit "Youthville" have helped bolster the "Together" project, Ahoudian said.

¶3. Not all young people of immigrant origin are as politically engaged as Ahoudian, said Faycal Douhane, a Socialist Party (PS) activist who is trying to increase political involvement among minorities across all party lines. Douhane urged the United States to continue to provide grants for worthwhile projects and to keep sending young community leaders on IV programs. Such activities help encourage greater political involvement, particularly among sectors of the population that have been underrepresented in France's leadership echelons. USG programs have already been successful at "identifying people who will eventually take positions of power in France, people who will change things," Douhane noted.

Embassy as Network Enhancer

¶4. The subjects of change and integration were front and center at a working breakfast December 9 hosted by the CAO with several activists from French non-profit organizations. The representatives described Embassy Paris as fulfilling a convening role and helping to build networks, both across the Atlantic and within France. Marie Trelle, who helps to manage Uniscite, an AmeriCorps-style NGO for French youths, said the USG helped her group to identify a site for the National Youth Services Conference in November. Marie-Christine Rimbault, head of the "Nos Quartiers Nos Talents" NGO aimed at creating private sector opportunity for minority youths, praised USG involvement in helping her

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organization reach a "diversity agreement" on equal employment opportunity with the EuroDisney theme park outside Paris.

¶5. Meanwhile, the editor-in-chief of Respect Magazine, Marc Cheb Sun, described his connection to the embassy as "intense." Respect's editorial mission is to build tolerance and acceptance among France's various ethnic and immigrant-origin communities. He praised the "intellectual exchange" he enjoys with public affairs staff on issue content. In addition, Cheb Sun said the embassy helped him cement contacts with civic groups in the United States who were essential partners as his editorial staff assembled an "America A-to-Z" issue of Respect. The magazine's circulation is roughly 60,000, and it maintains two Internet news sites.

Social Entrepreneurs: Help Us Meet

¶6. Creating a more equitable playing field for minority-owned businesses is among the current concerns at the La Ruche center for social entrepreneurs, the organization's representatives told Weil December 9. Note: "La Ruche" means bee hive in French. The center opened this year on a membership basis; the members are business people who want to use entrepreneurial methods to address systemic social problems in France. End note. Majid El Jaroudi, a member, told Weil that one key focus at present for La Ruche is a report on supplier diversity, or the extent to which minority-owned businesses win government contracts for construction, services or in other areas. With respect to how public affairs programs could help advance La Ruche's goals, El Jaroudi stressed the importance of the U.S. Embassy's ability to convene various interested parties for meetings. He thanked the embassy for hosting a major training event for

French social entrepreneurs at the Ambassador's Residence earlier this year, and for helping to sponsor the upcoming supplier diversity conference.

Blogs, Scholars and Imam Trainers

¶17. Weil also had discussions during her visit with the editors-in-chief of Safirnews.com, Oumma.com, and Bondy Blog, all of whom have traveled to the United States on exchange programs. The cyber journalists outlined their views on current challenges facing French Muslims and other minorities, underlining that job opportunities and instilling a sense of hope are essential for young and disadvantaged populations. Weil received a briefing at the Museum of Immigration History from the institution's director, who stressed the importance of mounting exhibits that demystify and place value on the experiences of France's millions of immigrants (minority French high schoolers touring the museum were overheard commenting enthusiastically on the recent U.S. elections).

¶18. Combating anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiments in France were the main topics of a working lunch with a pair of scholars December 9. Weil also heard from Youth Ambassador and high school student Idris Sisaid about the benefits of a U.S. exchange program in which he participated. In a meeting about Imam training, Mohamed Ali Bouharb of the military chaplaincy -- who also benefited from an embassy exchange program -- emphasized that the U.S. Embassy plays a special role in expanding the network of French movers and shakers in the field of diversity. "The only place France's top Muslims all gather at once is at the U.S. Ambassador's residence for the Iftar dinner," he commented to Weil. He also urged the Embassy to continue to support the process of interfaith dialogue.

¶19. In meetings at the Embassy, Public Affairs staff outlined the active minority outreach programs they conduct with very limited resources. The programs put a special emphasis on the U.S. experience in civil rights and in managing diversity, given the many challenges France still faces in this regard. The results of the programs have been positive, with a wide array of French interlocutors -- many of whom

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Weil met on this visit -- expressing appreciation for and interest in U.S. models of integration. Working with French partners, Public Affairs staff have helped put U.S. best practices to work to ease tension and promote social cohesion in disadvantaged communities where the need is most intense.
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